REMARKS

Claims 1-3, 5–8, 10-12 and 14-23 are in this application and are presented for consideration. By this amendment, Applicant has amended claims 1, 8, 10, 19, 22 and 23. Applicant wishes to bring to the Examiner's attention that the corresponding European patent application has been granted.

Claims 8 and 23 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicant regards as the invention.

Applicant has amended the claims paying close attention to the Examiner's remarks. It is Applicant's position that the claims as now presented are clear and fully comply with the requirements of the statute. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner remove the indefiniteness rejection in view of the changes to claims 8 and 23.

Claims 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 10-12, 14 and 16-23 under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Zimmer (US 6,109,682).

A key feature of the present invention is that the internal sheet and the external sheet have open ends, which means that the ends of the sheets are not closed by a bent portion of the sheets. This advantageously allows the internal sheet to slide against the external sheet when the internal sheet is placed on the external sheet. The ability of the internal sheet to slide against the external sheet is a critical feature of the present invention because it allows the bent edge area of the internal sheet to push against the bend of the external sheet to minimize the gap that is defined between the edge area of the internal sheet and the bend of the external

sheet. This is a significant departure from the approach disclosed in Zimmer.

Zimmer discloses a motor vehicle door or hatch that is connected in a manner that is very different from that of the present invention. According to Zimmer, the connection of the edge regions 2 and 4 of outer sheet 1 and inner sheet 3 is formed by bending edge strip 2 and/or 4 from the outer sheet 1 and the inner sheet 3 wherein the sheets are laid on each other and restrained in support area 6 between a support 14 and a hold-down device 15. This does not provide any teaching or suggestion of pushing the edge region of the inner sheet 3 against the edge region of the outer sheet 1 since the sheets 1 and 3 are restrained by the hold-down device 15. In order to minimize the gap between the inner sheet 3 and the outer sheet 1, Zimmer takes a very different approach when compared to that of the present invention. Zimmer discloses that a clamping slide 18 is pushed in a direction of the sheet metal plate to cause edge strip 2 of the outer sheet 1 to be pressed against the edge strip 4 of the inner sheet 3. This disadvantageously stresses and strains the outer sheet 1 and produces dips in the outer sheet 1. Applicant has solved this problem by providing an internal sheet that is moved along an external sheet so that the edge area of the internal sheet is pushed against the bend of the external sheet to minimize the gap between the internal sheet and the external sheet. This advantageously allows the internal sheet to abut the external sheet without providing any defects in the appearance of the external sheet. As such, the prior art as a whole takes a completely different approach and fails to teach or suggest each and every feature of the claimed combination.

Zimmer fails to teach and fails to suggest the combination of open ends of an internal

sheet and an external sheet that are welded after welding the gap between the internal sheet and the external sheet as claimed. According to the present invention, a flange end portion of the internal sheet and a flange end portion of the external sheet overlap each other to form overlapping flange end portions wherein the flange end portions extend in a direction parallel to a component plane defined by the two sheets. The overlapping flange end portions are welded to one another. This forms a second weld in addition to the weld formed in the gap between the edge area of the internal sheet and the bent portion of the external sheet. Zimmer does not teach or suggest such welded flange end portions as featured in the present invention. Although Zimmer may disclose parallel portions of outer sheet 1 and inner sheet 3 that are adjacent to respective edge areas 2, 4, the parallel portions are not welded and are not located opposite visible areas as claimed. In fact, Zimmer does not teach or suggest that the flange end portions are movable relative to one another as featured in the present invention. As such, the prior art as a whole does not anticipate the present invention as the prior art as a whole does not teach or suggest important features of the claimed combination. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner favorably consider claims 1, 10 and 19 as now presented and all claims that respectively depend thereon.

Claims 7 and 15 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Zimmer in view of Klaus et al. (EP 0200997).

Although Klaus et al. teaches a welded connection of two light-gauge sheets, the references as a whole fail to suggest the combination of features claimed. Specifically, Zimmer and Klaus et al. provide no suggestion or teaching for the combination of pushing an edge

region of an inner sheet against a bent portion of an outer sheet. As such, the references together do not teach or suggest the combination of features claimed. One of ordinary skill in the art is presented with various concepts, but these concepts do not provide any direction as to combining the features claimed. All claims define over the prior art as a whole.

Favorable consideration on the merits is requested.

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